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ABSTRACT

For many years, efforts to improve public schools centered on increased funding, teacher training, tougher curriculum (fewer electives, more math and science), and stiffer graduation requirements. But, from all of these attempts at reform, a basic concept became clear to the nation's educators: major reform of the public schools will not occur unless parents are made an integral part of the system. This primer was written to answer the question of how to bring about parents' involvement in their children's education. Each chapter, written by different contributors, covers a particular aspect of parental involvement in education. Chapters are: (1) "Environments that Affect Parental Involvement" (Mark Elin); (2) "Parental Involvement in Education: A Simple Primer" (Carlos A. Bonilla); (3) "Hello Parents. . . Where Are You? The Teachers' Perspective" (Steve Sue); (4) "Can You Help Save a Child? At-Risk Youth and Parental Involvement" (Michael Ann Leary); (5) "How Much Is a Child Worth? Parental Involvement in Public and Private Education" (Bradford Spacek); (6) "What about the Children? Public vs. Catholic Education" (Bradford Spacek); (7) "Trickle Down Involvement: An Overview of Federal, State and Local Parental Involvement Efforts" (Marc Elin); (8) "Bridging the Gap" (Sandy Campos, Hedda Dillon, Kimberly Hearn, and Patricia Kelly); and (9) "Effective Home and School Environments" (Marc Elin). Each chapter contains references. (EV)

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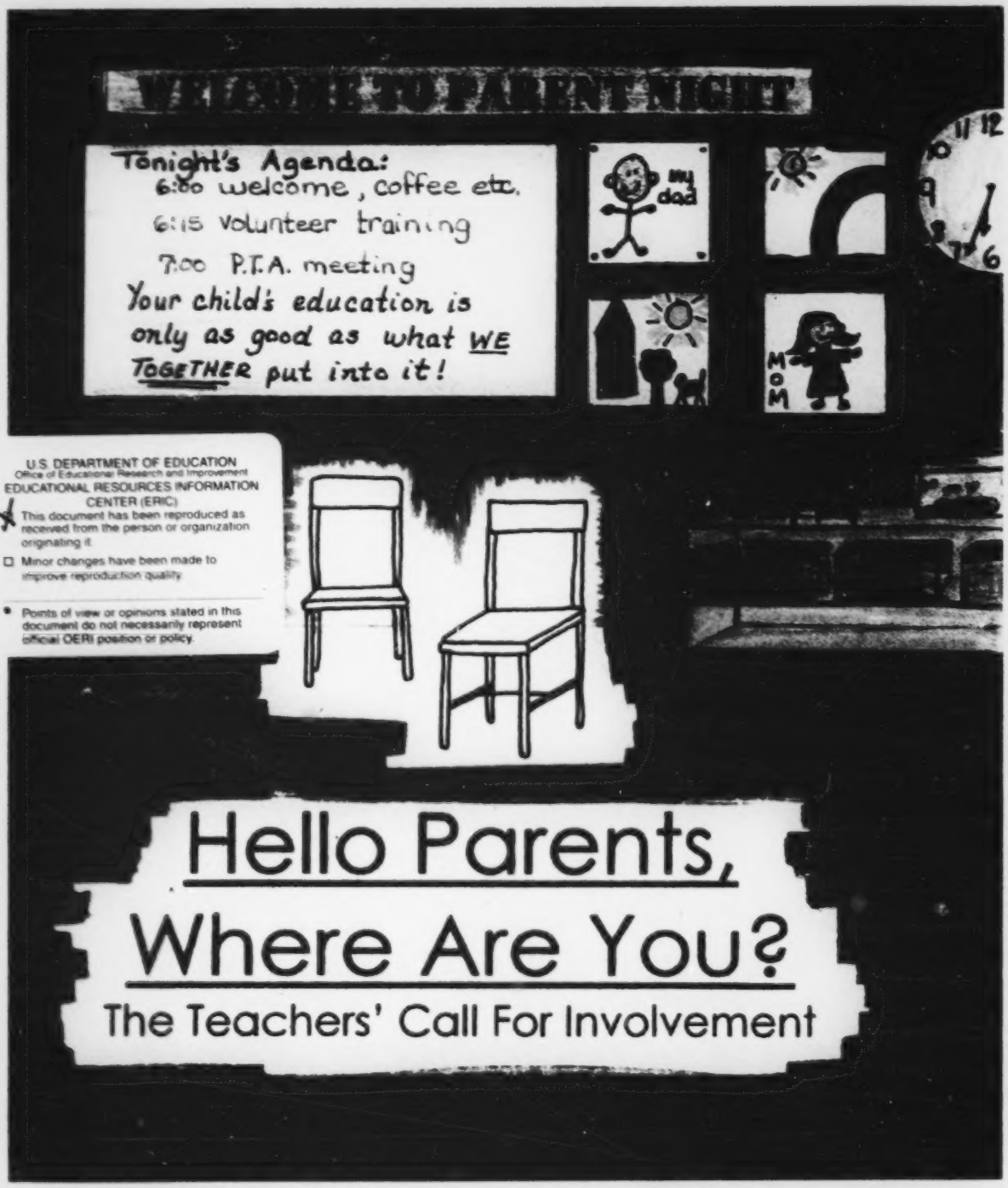
Tonight's Agenda:
6:00 welcome, coffee etc.
6:15 volunteer training
7:00 P.T.A. meeting
Your child's education is only as good as what WE TOGETHER put into it!
my dad
MOM

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Hello Parents, Where Are You?

The Teachers' Call For Involvement

Katherine Lynn Lauderdale, B.A. and Carlos A. Bonilla, Ph.D. Editors

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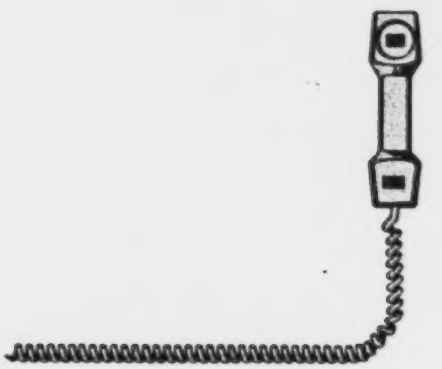
Where are you?



A Teachers' Call
For Involvement

Editors:

Katherine Lynn Lauderdale, B.A.
and
Carlos A. Bonilla, Ph.D.

Illustrator:

Patti McLean

Hello Parents. . . Where are you?

A Teachers' Call For Involvement

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Introduction

For over a decade, since the release of the "Nation at Risk" report in 1983, efforts to improve the public schools (K-12) centered on increased funding, teacher training, tougher curriculum (less electives, more math and science) and stiffer graduation requirements. But, from all these attempts at reform, one basic concept has become very clear to the nation's educators, simply this:

> **"Major reform of the public schools will not occur unless parents are made an integral part of the system."**

But, if the key to scholastic success is the parent's involvement in their children's education, how do we bring it about?

This primer tells you how; to find out, turn to the following pages.

Happy Reading!!!

Carlos A. Bonilla

Editor

Contributors

Editors:

Katherine Lynn Lauderdale is in pursuit of a doctorate in Clinical Psychology. She is self-employed as a consultant for accounting and computer software, and tutors college students in various classes. She resides in Stockton, California. Kathie co-edited and had her work published in "Chaotic Conversation: A Foray into the Complex World of Communication", ICA Publishing, 1998. She also co-edited "Tending to the Emotional Needs of Teachers and Children: Tricks of the Trade, ICA Publishing, 1998 and "Our Educational Melting Pot: Have we reached the boiling point?." ICA Publishing, 1998.

Carlos A. Bonilla is a molecular biologist and human geneticist who has published extensively in the fields of toxicology, pharmacology, and education. A former National Heart and Lung Institute (NIH-Cardiac Functions Branch) special fellow in Cardiovascular medicine, Dr. Bonilla has devoted much of his time during the past fifteen years as -a consultant, columnist and author-to the problems affecting K-12 students in general and Latino students in particular.

Cover Illustrator:

Patti McLean is a first grade teacher at Keyes School in Keyes, California (Stanislaus County). She enjoys art, reading and creating effective classroom and learning environments for her students. Patti's illustrative work appeared in "Chaotic Conversation: A Foray into the Complex World of Communication", ICA Publishing, 1998 and "Tending to the Emotional needs of Teachers and Children, ICA Publishing, 1998 and and "Our Educational Melting Pot: Have we reached the boiling point?." ICA Publishing, 1998. Patti created our cover

Contributors

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Kimberlie Ballard resides in Modesto, California with her new husband. She teaches first grade and reading recovery in the Manteca Unified School District. Kimberlie plans on attaining a Master's Degree as a Reading Specialist. Her hobbies include working with the deaf community and playing softball.

Sandy Campos bio not available

Hedda Dillon, a native of Denmark, started teaching twenty-five years ago. She is a single mother raising two teenagers. She is a music major and physical education minor and enjoys being part of the music ministry at Saint Bernadette's Church in Stockton, California. She teaches kindergarten in Stockton Unified School District. Hedda work was published in "Tending to the Emotional Needs of Teachers and Children: Tricks of the Trade, ICA Publishing, 1998.

Marc Elin has spent his life as a professional communicator. He sees his transition into the field of education as a direct extension of his fifteen years of experience in marketing, advertising, and graphic design. He believes effective teaching is knowing how to package appropriate messages for the variety of learners in today's classroom. His success in the classroom has placed him on district and county committees involving curriculum design and assessment. Educated at the San Francisco Academy of Art College, The Union Institute in Sacramento and National University, Stockton, California (teaching credential). Marc resides with his family in Santa Rosa, Californa. .

Patricia Kelly will begin teaching special education in the 98/99 school year. She is pursuing a Master's Degree in the same field and plans to work with deaf or special needs children. Her parents are foster parents for children with special needs and they have been instrumental in her career choice. Patricia thanks God for His guidance and inspiration.

Contributors

Michaelann Leary is a teacher with San Joaquin County Office of Education in the Alternative Program. She received a BS in Physical Education from Sacramento State University and her teaching Credential from National University in Stockton, California. Michael Ann wants to thank her mother, Kathleen Leary, for all her love and support, her past, present and future students for their inspiration and her Rottweiler Munchie, for the great big hugs.

Bradford Spacek currently teaches SED (Severely Emotionally Disturbed) children in North Valley School, Lodi, California. He has been married to Katherine for four years. Brad received his BA from the University of Texas in Business Management and is currently pursuing a Master's Degree from National University in Stockton, California. His hobbies include all sports, particularly golf, basketball and racquet ball, and reading.

Steven Sue bio not available

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Environments That

Affect

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a subjective science with success measured one family at a time. How do domestic, academic, and social environments can influence a child's attitude and behavior? The education field is just now beginning to recognize the value in fostering a positive student-parent relationship; unfortunately, parental involvement training requirements vary from state-to-state. This is evidenced by a 1994 survey of educators by the University of Minnesota which reported:

* Only seven states require principals or administrators to study parental involvement.
* Only fourteen states require most or all teachers to develop strategies for parental involvement.
* In states that require parental involvement training, it is often in early childhood or student disability training.
* 45 percent of the educators who did receive training considered it not effective, while 34 percent found it somewhat effective.

We examine the federal, state and local educational environments that affect parental involvement and focus attention on contributing family and cultural environments.

Marc Elin

Parental Involvement

in

Education

A Simple Primer

Carlos A. Bonilla. Ph.D.

The Problem

There is no question about it:

One of the major building blocks of a child's success is

the parental interest in school.

When parents fail to stress the importance of education, kids tend to do pretty much as they want, what they want:

Which is YUP, you guessed it

NOT VERY MUCH AT ALL

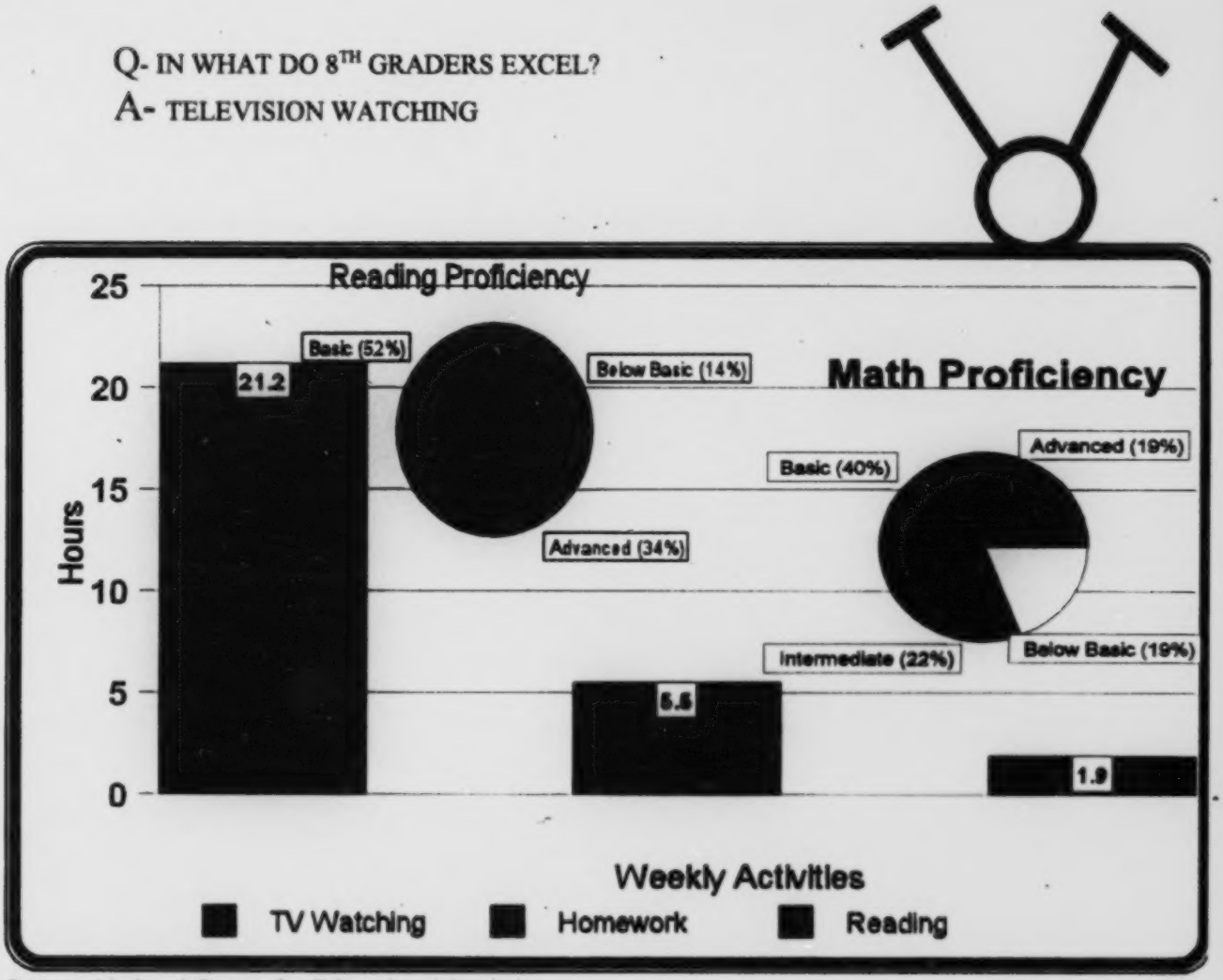
This is a centuries old truism which came to light in an extensive survey by the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education) named NELS:88 for National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. Further, the survey showed eighth graders simply do not have a propensity to discuss their high school plans; actual finding:

Discussed plans three or more times during the year with:

- **FATHERS (31.3%)**
- **MOTHERS (54.5%)**
- **TEACHERS (8.1%)**
- **SCHOOL COUNSELORS (6.1%)**

Q- IN WHAT DO 8TH GRADERS EXCEL?

A- TELEVISION WATCHING



Source: National Center for Educational Statistics.

A national survey of nearly 25,000 eighth graders showed that 14% do not understand what they read and 20% are unable to perform simple mathematics. Eighth graders, it appears, spend four times as many hours in front of the TV set as they do with their homework. Saddest truth of all, they read on their own for a little less than two hours a week.

Parental Involvement: The Parents' Side

It is perfectly legitimate for parents to hold the school system accountable for providing their children with a good education, in a safe, clean and comfortable environment conducive to learning. But, to do this effectively, parents must be willing to do their part; here are some simple guidelines:

Before making a judgement on a teacher's skill or performance:

- Meet the teacher and make an "informed" decision on competency; this means "your own decision," not one based on hearsay or your child's complaints.
- If the school allows it, sit in on one or several classes.
- Is the teacher being kept from doing a good job because of disruptive students or too many pupils in the class?
- If you are still not satisfied, talk to the principal, then the superintendent, and -if necessary- the school board.
- Don't be shy about asking the principal to place you child in a different teacher's class the next year if you feel this would be better for your child's education.

And, for heavens sake, if you think the teacher is doing a good job, be sure to tell her or him so; then:

Tell the Principal, then

Write a note to the superintendent, then

Write or call the school board. When doing a good job, we all need affirmation; above all:

LET THE SCHOOL SYSTEM KNOW THAT YOU, AS A PARENT, ARE AWARE OF A GOOD AND EFFECTIVE TEACHER.

PARENTS: BE PREPARED

Sample questions a parent should have when going to a parent-teacher conference:

- Why isn't my kid working to his or her ability?
- Does my child get along with you, the teacher?
- Does my child get along with his/her classmates?
- Have there been any specific incidents of hostility or altercations?
- In what subject does my child excel? In which are there deficiencies?
- Homework: Is it turned in on time? Well done? Clean and completed?
- Homework: How much should my child, actually, be bringing home? How much time should he/she be spending on it every night?

Finally, the important ***what can I do to help?***

When approaching the teacher or principal, don't go in ready to attack; your attitude should be:

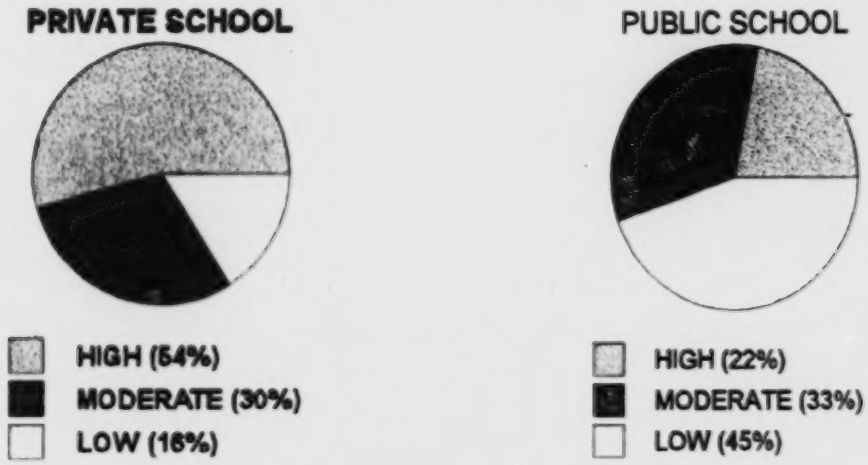
"My child has a problem in school; how can we solve it together?

Both you and the teacher have a vested interest in your child's education:

Work together, as a team, not as adversaries!

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

A number of studies have shown that parents of minority children tend to have a much lower level of involvement than do white parents. This holds true even when correction for income, number of parents in household, education and other factors are made; even after these adjustments, the level of parents reporting at least a moderate degree of participation in their child's school was 55 percent for Black or Hispanic parents compared to 62 percent for non-Hispanic Whites. The level of participation in school activities by parents of children attending private school is well over twice that of those attending public schools and this has been shown, over and over, to correlate well with the higher level of academic achievement in the private school student population. For grades 6-12 these are the figures of academic achievement:



The percentage of parents reporting moderate to high involvement in their children's activities at school decreases progressively as the child/student becomes older. It is very significant that precipitous drops occur between the ages 11-12 and 12-13, which are known to be crucial developmental times in pre-adolescent children.

Family/School Characteristics and Parental Involvement

Highest Participation:

Child in elementary grade, or attending a private school

At least one parent is a college graduate

Financially stable, comfortable

A two-parent family

Mother works part-time

Lowest Participation:

Child attends a large public high school with

A large minority student enrollment

Parents are high school dropouts or barely have a high school education

Low income or poverty level household

Only one parent present or a parent and a step-parent

Mother is unemployed

The level of parental involvement is an effective predictor of students' achievement as shown by these percentages:

Needing to repeat a grade:
- High: 11%
- Low: 25%

Have placement in the bottom half of their class:
- High: 26%
- Low: 56%

Being suspended or expelled from school
- High: 7%
- Low: 21%

School contacted parent about child's behavior
- High: 14%
- Low: 21%

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: THE TEACHERS' SIDE

Recent surveys of teachers by the Metropolitan Life Insurance company have shown that nearly three quarters (0ver 70%) of parents view teachers and schools as adversaries. How was this brought about? Several years ago, the school system sent out a message which essentially said to parents "stay out, we are the professionals, we are the ones who truly know what's best for your child." But, continuing decline in test scores, high dropout rates, the proliferation of gangs in the schools, youth violence and the high number of illiterate high school graduates have led parents to question: Is this really so? Do schools really know what is best for my kids? Fortunately, today most schools work extremely hard to involve parents and to make them part of the system.

The result? Much improved parent-teacher relations! Let's not forget another factor: When a child is not performing well in school, some parents look for scapegoats and, who better and more accessible than the teachers, principals and schools? Remember, it is the teacher's responsibility to make parents feel comfortable during a conference: to many parents, teachers can be intimidating perhaps, in part, because in many cases the educational achievement level is so different.

AT TEACHER-PARENT CONFERENCES

- Remind the parent about the primary reason for the conference. To help the student.
- Remind each parent the conference should not become a brag session about all the child's "great" qualities.
- Remind the parent you don't have to be convinced that the child comes from a great home; while possibly true, it is not germane to the task at hand.
- Be cautious not to let the conference become a negative session from either or both sides.

To be truly successful, the parental involvement efforts will require more extensive and effective training of teachers in how to handle parents.

It is of interest to note the results of a survey carried out by the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota; when assessing the effectiveness of parental involvement training they had received in college, these were the results (surveyed 1800 educators):

Found it extremely effective	4%
Found it effective	17%
Found it somewhat effective	34%
Found it not at all effective	45%

In summary, colleges should do more to instruct teachers in how to enhance parental involvement in education.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: THE PRINCIPAL'S SIDE

A recently conducted survey of well over 10,000 elementary and middle school principals showed an amazing degree of agreement on what they view as essential ways in which parents can help in the education of their children.

Over 90 percent agreed on, what we like to call, the Eleven Commandments of Parental Involvement:

1. Listen to and talk with your children, often, very often! Pay attention to their feelings and their questions.
2. Instill in your children a very strong work ethic and begin prior to kindergarten.
3. Show genuine pride in the academic accomplishments and growth of your child.
4. Help your children's perception of themselves as capable problem solvers.
5. Have fun having your child read to you aloud and vice-versa.
6. Set practical and realistic goals for your children.
7. Encourage your children to do their school work in a positive and consistent manner.
8. Be available to assist them with their homework when needed.
9. Give priority to school work, reading, writing and other scholastic activities. Discourage television, videos, video games, and MTV particularly when they conflict with the attainment of academic achievement.
10. Get well-acquainted with your children's school work, school activities, their teachers and their school.
11. Make plans for the effective use of time in the home for studying, playing, eating, rest and recreational activities.

BEWARE THE GREAT COMMUNICATION GAP

There is no question about it: an abysmal communication gap exists in how kids and their parents perceive what is going on in the schools. Louis Harris and Associates National survey of 1,000 parents and 2,500 public school students, sponsored by the United States Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, released in December, 1994, re-affirms it; consider the disparity:

* Percent who believe all students complete homework assignments:
  Parents: 82%
  Students: 4%

* Percent who say teachers and parents have good or excellent relationships:
  Parents: 67%
  Students: 34%

* Percent who believe student and teachers get along "very well" at school:
  Parents: 42%
  Students: 21%

* Percent who say children "nearly always" tell parents about problems with other students:
  Parents: 52%
  Students: 24%

* Percent who say the media contribute to violence in public schools:
  Parents: 71%
  Students: 51%

So, to you, parents and teachers, I say: Let this be a lesson and be sure to remember the KID-PARENT COMMUNICATION GAP when trying to straighten out the student's problems during your own parent-teacher conference.

Beware

Parents: Heed this Bit of Reality!

Your participation in school activities means obtaining first hand knowledge about

What goes on in your child's classroom

What is happening in your child's school leading to:

More effective coordination between you and your child's teacher resulting in:

- Greater personal attention to your child by the teacher
- Early detection of potential problems with the ensuing early corrective actions

This produces a win:win situation for you, your child and his/her teacher.

Educator: What is Your Answer?

Does your school truly welcome parental involvement, even from the parents who:

1. Feel uneasy because of their low level of formal schooling

   or

2. Feel intimidated because of their inability to speak and understand the English language.

If so, Congratulations!

You and your school are a credit to the American public school system.

If not...

Is it not time to make some real changes?

AGAIN, WHAT, EDUCATORS, IS YOUR ANSWER?

Hello Parents . . .

Where Are You?

The Teachers' Perspective

Steve Sue

Hello, Parents . . . Where are you?

This statement is a thought commonly shared by teachers when faced with the problems of encouraging and increasing parental involvement. In today's society we live in a world where multi-culturalism and ethnic diversity have now become an important issue of day to day life and this new-found awareness has entered the classroom, where teachers now face increasingly diverse student populations.

In California, part of this awareness can be traced to the recent influx of immigrants from Southeast Asia and the constant stream of immigrants from Mexico and other countries. Their influence in American society has brought about educational awareness in multi-cultural and ethnic issues for the teacher. What we are seeing is more than a racial issue; it is also a social, religious and cultural awareness requirement which, when added to the responsibilities of teaching makes the job more difficult. This is where the importance of parental involvement plays a key role.

We all know the importance of it. Parents help reinforce the importance of education and provide the necessary motivation and encouragement for their children to be successful in school. They help shape policy in schools and assist in academic and disciplinary matters in the classroom. Involvement occurs both at home and through participation in the classroom and school activities. But encouraging parental involvement can be one of the most difficult challenges facing both new and experienced teachers in the multi-cultural, diverse classroom (Kochalian).

The Problems

As teachers, we all know the frustrations associated with trying to get parents involved. Both parents working, single parent households, lack of interest in their child's education, transportation problems, fear or shame caused by not being able to understand or help with homework and, of course, the belief that education should be the teacher's responsibility.

Another factor: students may have had teachers who either did not actively encourage parental involvement or have become too tired and frustrated at the process.

Some teachers feel parents of lower social and economic class are not willing to participate in their child's education because of their own problems. Multicultural and multiethnic aspects pose additional barriers: these include such concerns as lack of knowledge on cultural and religious beliefs and the inability to communicate due to language barriers (Ritter).

Many myths also exist about minority parents. Some teachers point out to the lack of interest in participating in functions such as Open-house or PTA meetings, and mean they (parents) have no interest. There is also the flip side of the coin where some minority parents become too pushy or insensitive to understand the teacher's goals for their child, which often results in labeling the teacher "insensitive". All of these add to the general confusion and result in further erosion of parental involvement. Some can be attributed to lack of understanding or misinterpretation on the part of the teacher (Ritter).

Solutions: School Programs

With the passage of laws such as Chapter One, school districts are required to meet a minimum standard for encouraging and recruiting involvement by parents. Much of Chapter One consists of encouraging parental involvement through implementation of programs in which parents participate in the home or directly in the class or school (D'Angelo). They also include provisions to help those parents, whose principle language is NOT English or who are not literate, get involved. Many schools have formulated or adapted a variety of programs to this effect:

Academy

In Stockton (California) Unified School District's Edison High School, there is a unique program aimed at helping students who are failing school due to poor grades, excessive absenteeism, pregnancy and aggressive behavior in class. The students attend four classes in science, history, English and math which are structured to help them gain self-confidence through improved study habits and to regain credits lost due to their prior actions. Students may gain privileges, such as attending a fifth period class on the regular campus, through the work they do in class. The hope is to eventually mainstream them back into regular school. While attending, students are not allowed to participate in any regular activities: sports, dances or other sponsored by the school. Parental involvement is planned at the beginning of placement and if a student shows no signs of improvement a parent conference is called with teachers, parent(s), counselor, and the student. The purpose is to give the parent an opportunity to review his/her child's progress, participate in motivating the child to improve and assist in disciplinary decisions (Graves).

Student Study Teams

This is a middle-school program where students are evaluated at the end of the sixth grade by their teachers who make recommendations based on factors such as academics and behavior (emotional and mental health). From there students are placed in groups at the beginning of the middle-school. Each group is comprised of a team of teachers from various subject levels. They work with the students on their regular class work and set up special learning centers for students who require additional help. Placement is through evaluation by teachers as well as parents.

Parent Centers

This program aims at parental education. Here centers are set up and operated by both paid staff and volunteers (usually other parents), so parents can visit. Classes such as English as a second language and general education are provided. Development is aimed at making the parent feel more at ease and knowledgeable about their child's learning and information on their classes. It is also used as a probate area for parents to meet and discuss with their child's teacher. These centers give parents a feeling of having their own room, of belonging, and more willing to involve themselves with the school (Davies).

What can I do?

When faced with the common situation of non-parental participation the thought comes to mind "Well, what do I do now?" A legitimate question, especially if you are also faced with little or non-existent support from administration or, the district. The answer is simply to use the resources within your reach, more importantly, within yourself. Be creative! Parent involvement is in many ways, similar to selling a product, which in this case, is the child's education; and teachers can do it. Consider:

Networking

This is a great method of learning new ways for improving parental involvement by communicating with other teachers, counselors, department heads and educational specialists (ESL and special education) at school or within the District. Other sources such as the Internet, Parent-Teacher Associations and Teachers Unions.

Calling

Perhaps one of the most accessible tools to making any contact with the parent. Calling on a regular basis (weekly or monthly) can greatly improve upon parent-teacher relations. It is important a teacher call not only when trouble arises, but to emphasize any accomplishments their child has achieved (Apalit).

Open-House

This is probably the most important and, many times, the first chance or opportunity for contact with parents; enticement is the key to success! Giving notice and reminders through letters and phone calls help. Setting up a display of the classroom also becomes an important factor once they arrive.

Policy Contract

This refers to setting policy for the class in terms of disciplinary procedures, what events scheduled, students' expectations in terms of work (both in class and at home), and on visitations/parent conferences. The contract is signed by both the teacher and the student alike before it is taken home to be returned after the parent signs it. This method greatly helps parents understand classroom policies and improves parent-teacher relations.

Open Door Policy

This is one of the most important items in improving parent-teacher relations. By letting parents know that you are available to answer questions or concerns, barriers are brought down and apprehensions diminish. .

Parental/Student Centers

A teacher can set up a specific day in the week for parents to come in, observe, interact and ask questions concerning their child's progress and the subjects being taught. Here the class is broken into units or groups, students actually move from one center to another, review, or continue a lesson plan on a particular subject. Parents arrive at different times or can follow during the entire school day. This does require reformatting lesson plans to include these days (Terluk).

Outside Sources

City, county and state health organizations and welfare agencies can be of great help. Many have had to research and understand the culture and religions of minority

groups, ie: the south east Asian community, in order to differentiate and approach problems. Excellent sources include:

- County or State Child Protective Services
- Department of Health and Welfare
- Local School District ESL coordinator
- Private Industry Council (California only)
- Private Arts Groups (Theater Companies)
- Local Parks and Recreation Departments

There are also numerous private groups and associations which include neighborhood associations, churches and Service Clubs(Rotary).

Students

The students in your class, and in other classes, are an excellent resource in learning about their culture and their family values which may be misinterpreted by yourself. This can be accomplished through small group meetings or one-on-one chats.

Be Creative

Perhaps the greatest resource of all is **YOU!** The best ideas come from your experiences and what you have learned from others. Keep an open mind, tap into resources such as other parents to help in explaining or teaching other parents to understand their child's schoolwork. Finding out about your student's family through short interviews with them or by asking their past teachers about them. Modify or adapt methods used by other teachers but most importantly be open, honest and tolerant with the parent.

Summary

Remember, you are not as lost or forgotten as you may think! For the most part, parents of all ethnic cultures do want to be involved in their children's education, but many have been either shut out by past teachers or misunderstood due to the teacher's own lack of knowledge.

There are many programs, both school-sponsored and those self-created, aimed at helping teachers be successful in improving parental involvement; you must play the role of a detective finding out as much about the student's family both from an ethnic and social aspect. The key to succeeding is caring, and above all, tolerance. These items are key success factors in working in the multi-cultural diverse classroom.

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Can You Help Save A Child?

At-Risk Youth and Parental Involvement

Michaelann Leary

Parents today are less involved in their children's education and citing lack of time is one of the reasons. The Washington Times study on parental involvement in education surveyed over 1,000 kindergarten through sixth grade parents. The results showed only 58 percent of the parents had visited the teacher fewer than 5 times in a school year and that parents tended to be more involved with the children's education during the primary years.

Eighth-Graders and Their Parents

43% of parents helped their children with homework more than twice a month.

67% had never discussed the academic program

71% had not seen their child's classroom

Source: 1991 U.S. Department of Education

Many surveys have found the decrease in parent interest begins once the child leaves elementary school. For minority children, lack of parental involvement can place them "at-risk" for more than just poor academic performance.

At-Risk Youths in Trouble

* "At-risk" children are defined as high risk of mental, learning, health and emotional problems.

* "At-Risk" in the schools can be classified as:

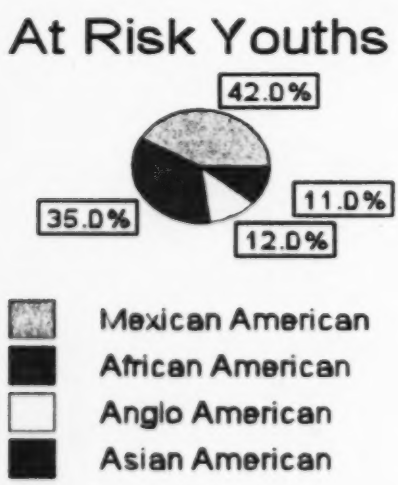
Elementary School-Parent neglect, abuse, exposure to drugs and alcohol, poor diet and health problems.

Middle School- Using drugs and alcohol, truancy, not participating in school, dressing inappropriately, bringing weapons, drug or alcohol to school, and delinquency.

High School-Parent neglect, abuse, truancy, inappropriate dress, and sexual behavior, use or sell drugs or alcohol, and delinquency.

When youths violate the law they are placed in a juvenile justice center until their court appearance. The judge decides if the youth should be in a placement home, on probation, jail or a juvenile program in the desert for at-risk youth. I conducted my own survey of at-risk youths in a juvenile justice center in San Joaquin County, California in hopes of finding what moved them from being "at-risk" to in-trouble. The study consisted of 100 males ages 12 to 17 of which:

84% have divorced or separated parents
15% of the 84% did not know their father



Mexican-American Youth Profile

"My family fell apart, and my dad is in prison. The gang is the only way to survive. I need to protect my family."
– 16 year old.

"My Grandfather is in prison, and my father died in prison. My grandmother was released two years ago, and my mother was convicted for murder. We are all in a gang and we will die for our gang."
–17 year old

The at-risk Mexican-American youths came from families consisting of three or more siblings from more than one father. Eighty percent of the Hispanic mothers did not work. The fathers who were involved in the child's education did not participate in school activities, but did stress the importance of a good education. Sixty percent of the fathers are in prison. The mothers did not have much influence in their education. On a scale of 1-10, the youths rated their parent's involvement a four.

The most striking statistic for this group was that they were one hundred percent affiliated with gangs. Moreover, gang affiliation was generational within the family. If the youth was the oldest in the family, he joined the gang through his peers. If not the oldest, he was introduced to the gang through the older siblings.

Summary:

Mothers not working	80%
Father in prison	60%
Gang Affiliation	100%

African-American Youth Profile

"Work in the gang, and enjoy the easy life in a few years. My mother is on drugs and my father is in prison. Why work?"
–15 year old

Parent involvement could have only been half-realized with this group reporting one hundred percent of parents either divorced or never married. Ninety percent of the youths did not know their father, (whether the father was absent or in prison). Forty percent of the mothers were in prison. Thirty percent of the parents were reported as substance abusers. This group have three or more siblings with different fathers and report that one or more of them are locked-up or in a placement facility.

"I started stealing at the age of 8. I needed to provide food for my younger brothers and sisters. My mom was passed out on the couch from drugs and alcohol. I am now being convicted for my ninth grand theft auto charge, and two assaults.
– 17 year old

The youth rated the parent's interest in their education as no higher than a four. They remember little parent interest in their education and even less as they became older. Nobody supported education for these kids. After school they could do whatever they wanted, with little or no supervision which led ninety-five percent to find new families through gang affiliation. One 16 year-old youth takes pride in knowing he was going to be taken care of by his gang, especially with his older brother and sister holding high seniority in the same gang.

Summary:

Parents divorced/never married	100%
Do not know the father	90%
Mothers in prison	40%
Substance abusing parents	30%
Gang affiliation	95%

Anglo-American Youth Profile

"My mother used school as a baby-sitting place, while she stayed home watching TV, playing video games, getting fat and collecting welfare.
–15 year old

The Anglo-American group had the lowest number of siblings ranging from one to three, but shared the same high parent divorce rate at 100 percent. They reported neither parent showing interest in promoting the value of education. Two types of parents were identified:

Parent Group One: Seventy-five of the parents in this group are non-working and receiving welfare. There was also a high reporting of substance abuse. Youth with parents in group one rated the parental interest they received growing up only a two on a scale of 1 to 10. They reported that other siblings in the family live with neither the mother or father, but in a placement home.

"Mom and dad worked so much and were too busy with their own careers to know what was going on with the kids. We all began drinking alcohol and getting drunk

Parent Group Two: The second group of parents were predominately upper-middle class. Parents in group two did stress the value of education, however, their involvement was limited to the early primary grades. There were some reports of substance abuse. Youths from this group rated their parents' involvement at 6.5 on a scale from 1 to 10.

Neither group of youth reported gang affiliation.

Summary:

Divorced Parents	100%
Mothers not working	75%
Gang Affiliation	0%

Asian-American Youth Profile

"A good education will lead to a good life. This will happen before your parents leave. This is what my parents told me."
–17 year old

Hmong youth in this survey are first-generation American. They come from homes with six or more siblings (all from the same parents), the parents pushed their children to do their school work before any chores or play. The value of education is placed high. Hmong gave their parents the highest rating of any group: 9.5 on a scale of 1 to 10. What is startling about this group in the survey is the high percentage of gang affiliation (100%). They reported, however, that even if they belonged to a gang, school still came first. Though they feel strong support from home, the gang gives protection.

Cambodian The small percentage of Cambodian youth reported, all `parents are married, and four to seven siblings per family. Their parents are involved in education, but did not stress it as much as the Hmong. All of these youth agreed the parents trusted the school to provide a safe and clean environment for their children to learn. The rating of parental involvement was six on a scale from 1 to 10. There was no report of gang affiliation.

Summary:

	Hmong	Cambodian
Gang Affiliation	100%	0%
Parents Married	100%	100%

Prevention May Be the Answer

All the youth in this survey had been identified "at-risk" at an earlier point in the education system. Perhaps greater support from home and school could have reduced the "risks" in and outside school, thus eliminating the need to replace family with gang affiliation. Prevention and awareness must be the first steps taken in reducing enrollment in the last-chance schools: Juvenile Justice Centers.

Educating and working with the children's parents is the key to parental involvement. A program in Stockton Unified School District, through Walton School, focuses on parental involvement with drug-exposed and low income infants and children. The program offers education and assistance for the parents and their children to merge into the traditional school system. Teachers and assistants work closely with infants and young children in the area of motor learning and basic communication skills in preparation for pre-school and kindergarten. All of the program's staff works to educate and encourage the parents to get involved and stay involved includes making home visits to work with the family. Teacher should distribute information on parental involvement in and out of the classroom and invite parents to participate in activities, field trips and educational programs; also should routinely follow up on the parents, and the progress of their involvement. Good communication with them will equal a greater behavior and educational outcome in the student and classroom.

Parents need to help schools by preparing their children for success at an early age. Simple guidelines like the ones below put involvement within every parent's reach (Bonilla).

Eleven Commandments of Parental Involvement

- Listen and talk with your children, paying attention to their feelings and questions
- Before kindergarten, instill a strong work ethic in your children.
- Show pride in the academic accomplishments and growth of your child.
- Help your children see themselves as problem solvers.
- Read with your child aloud, taking turns reading.
- Set goals for your children, both practical and realistic.
- Teach and encourage your children to be positive in their school work.
- Be available to help with homework.
- Make school a priority, and encourage reading, writing and scholastic activities. Discourage TV, video games and videos.
- Get aquainted with your children's school work, school activities and their teachers.
- Implement and teach your children how to use time wisely for home, recreational activities, study and play.

Reducing the risks for failure at home and in the classroom will help keep today's troubled youth out of gangs and correctional facilities and safe at home with the real families.

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How much is a child worth?

Parental Involvement in Public and Private Education

Bradford Spacek

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life!"

This common saying is repeated countless times across this great land. It is often the philosophy of educators and teachers we find in the classrooms of America. The *belief*, which we have handed been down from generation-to-generation, that each day, we have a chance to start afresh and make something special of our lives. It is the hope that no matter how bad things may seem, if we work hard enough, things change for the better. It is that desire, to see the bettering of the school-age child, which has led to one of the hottest debates raging today: "Why are our children doing so badly in school?" This section will try to help answer this question and examine information that may help set us on the road to a better tomorrow.

Why *are* our children doing so badly in school? This question is bandied about by practically everyone today; plastered in newspapers and magazines, dissected on talk shows, it has reared its ugly head, like an unconquerable monster, waiting to devour all that trod on its domain. The problem lies in determining who is responsible for their plight. A difficult task which must be accomplished, before we can ever hope to really change the lives of children and the total educational process.

Many educators and teachers feel parents are to blame for what has taken place, the lack of manners and respect, the drastic fall in parental involvement.

> ***"You cannot say to the schools . . . 'You have to do this. You have to do that' . . . The basic problem is the lack of parental involvement with children."***
>
> -John Roberts, School Teacher

The prevailing philosophy is to say, to all who will listen: "It is not our fault!" Meanwhile, parents have some finger pointing of their own to do. They say the schools are the big problem. Parental complaints range from classes being too large and teachers

that do not care, to unsafe schools and increased financial pressures. Many see their children's test scores drop and drop, though tens of millions of dollars are funneled into the schools and feel that, until recently, many school districts *discouraged* involvement in all but a few areas with the attitude, "We are the professionals, what do you know? . . . We know what is best, leave the children's education to us."

Now, as the clamor of voices blares parents feel they are being unjustly singled out, becoming the scapegoats of the American education system, their heads being placed on the chopping block. **"Who is right?"**.

The answer to that question is very complicated. In the past decade or so, the government has been spending more money on education and special programs but test scores have continued to drop while the per-student expenditures have continued to rise; the results? Dismal at best!

Meanwhile, as the environments of the public schools continue to worsen, parents are getting fed up over the lack of progress and many are looking for alternatives to public schools. They are beginning to pull their children out of the public institutions and enrolling them in private schools rising the *ire* of the public system's teachers and administrators. This shift in students, and the subsequent loss of funding, has forced close scrutiny and comparison of public and private schools.

Just how do they compare? First, how about parental involvement? A United States Department of Education survey (1993) found parental involvement to be dramatically higher in private than in public school (Zill).

The degree of involvement (high, low) was based on responses to three questions:

- ...attended a general school meeting, for example, back to school night or a meeting of a parent-teachers organization
- ...attended school or class events such as a play, sports event, or science fair
- ...acted as a volunteer at the school or served on a school committee

Parents participating in only one of the above were depicted as having a low level of involvement. Those who participated in two categories had a moderate level while those who participated in all three had high parental involvement.

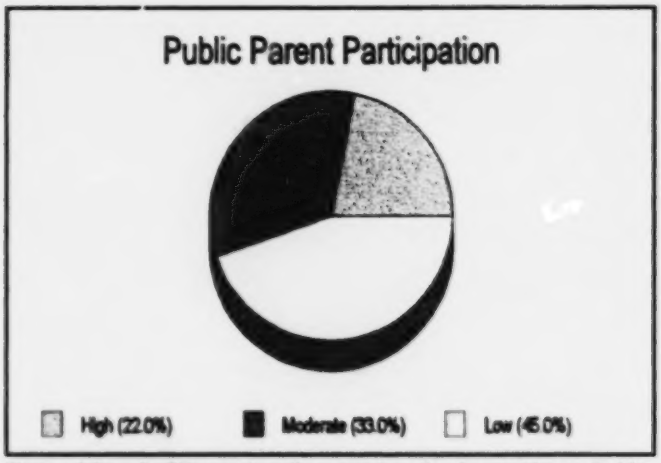

Figure 1 Level of Parent involvement in school activities in Public School, U.S. Students in Grades 6-12, 1993

Figure 1 reveals the results: Parents, who registered in the high to moderate range, make up only 55 percent of the parents (whose students are in public schools). Forty-five percent are in the low range.

Almost half of all parents of public school students rate little involvement, in the overall educational process of their children! Studies have shown that students spend many hours watching TV and very little on homework or studying; baby-sitting is left to the idiot box.

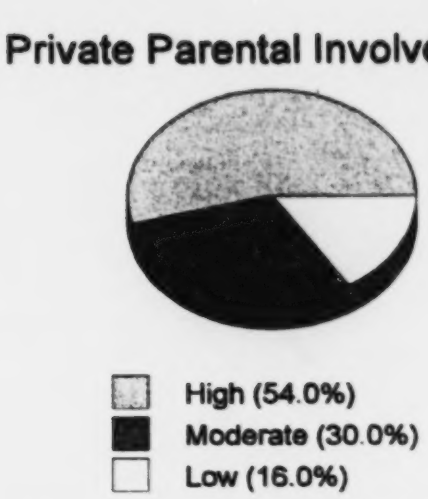

Figure 2 Level of Parent involvement in school activities in private schools, U.S. Students in grades 6-12, 1993.

Parental involvement in the private school sector is high. Figure 2 shows a large difference between the private sector and the public system. The combined percentages of the moderate and high involvement come to 84 percent, while the public percentiles for the same equal only 55 percent. This is a difference of nearly 30 percent.

More than eight in ten parents in the private school systems are moderately-to-highly involved in their child's educational process (Zill).

Some people may complain this survey does not accurately measure parental involvement . . . In the San Jose Mercury News, (California) Anne Federwisch finds these statistics questionable (Federwisch, 1994). The example she used, showed the involvement of four parents. The first went to three different activities and had a total involvement of nine hours. Participating in only two of the categories of activities, the second parent had 50 hours of total participation. Parent number three was involved in only one category but had a total involvement of 780 hours Parent number four had no involvement. Federwisch stated the third parent would be placed in the low involvement category, though the total hours of involvement was the greatest. The same thing happened with the second parent whom they categorized as moderate but had more total time than the first parent.

While her example may bring up a valid point, the third parent's involvement in their child's overall educational process is low. Federwisch gives a skewed view of the involvement process. She wants to equate hours of involvement with overall involvement, when it is not so, for a parent who would spend hundreds of hours on fund raisers and not attend any other function or meeting, is not truly involved in the total educational process of their child. It would be the same, if you spent 780 hours teaching math and nothing else, and then told the child, "Because you have spent so many hours in this area, we have fully educated you in all subjects." It would be a blatantly false assumption and so is Anne Federwisch's.

So why do private schools have such a higher rate of parental involvement? These schools are usually much more involved in getting parent participation than public schools because most receive much less in per-student funding, forcing them to view the need of parental involvement as vital to their existence. While most public schools put parent participation on the back burner, many private schools have active parental involvement programs built into the very process and fabric of their operations. Most private schools simply do not have the luxury of not involving the parent, as so many public schools do.

Is parental involvement really that important? Lauro F. Cavazos , U.S. Education Secretary under the Bush Administration, thinks so:

> ***"Data has repeatedly shown that parental participation is the <u>most critical factor</u> behind the achievement of high levels of academic performance among all age categories and ethnic groups"*** -(Ramos)

Though the data does show parental involvement to be so important, it seems the public schools are not as adept, overall, in eliciting their participation as the private institutions. The trend has begun to change in the public sector, and many teachers are beginning to realize parental involvement is vital. Unfortunately, too many teachers are saying, "If only the parents would get involved," yet never reaching for their support.

One reason teachers get discouraged in the public schools is that they see the task of raising parental involvement as an insurmountable burden since they feel parents should already be involved. They do not see the need for teachers to bend over backwards to get them to come to a simple class meeting or help with some simple areas in discipline. Large numbers of students can be a severely detrimental factor. If a teacher meets one hundred or more students a day, getting all of the parents contacted would be nearly impossible. It is no wonder so many can only stand by as the situation in their schools just gets worse.

Should the teachers in these situations just give up? We can only hope for the sake of our country and the children, the answer is, **"NO!"** We must look for those that are successful in getting parents involved and use what we can to help make our programs be the best they can be.

WE MUST STEP BEYOND ALL ARGUMENTS AND FINGER POINTING AND USE ALL THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SAVE OUR CHILDREN. IF WE DO NOT, OUR COUNTRY IS IN DIRE TROUBLE. WE MUST ASK OURSELVES,

"WHAT IS A CHILD WORTH?"

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What about the children?

Public vs Catholic Education

Bradford Spacek

Public and Private schools have too often been at war with each other, yet they both agree parental involvement is a key factor. While public institutions may criticize private ones, it often seems the general populous basically perceives private schools to be better overall. Parental involvement is the main reason.

The effects of parental participation, on student behavior are shown in the following graphs:

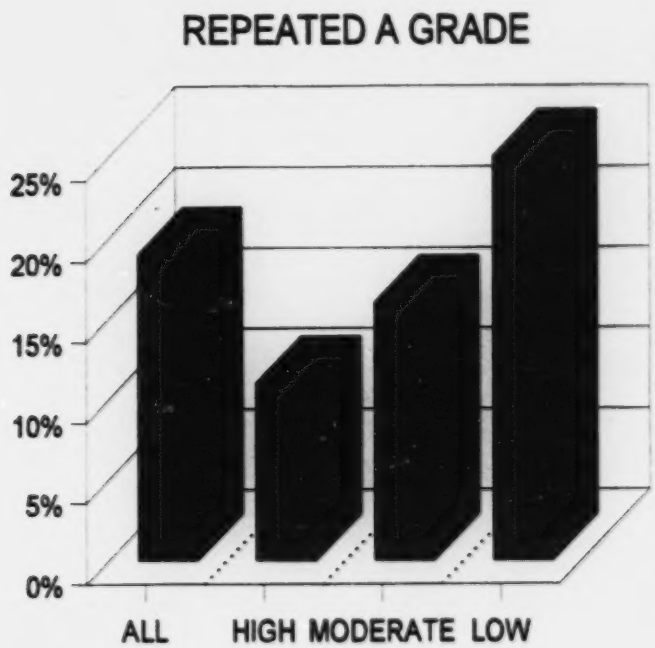


Figure 1

Figure 1 represents the percentage of students having to repeat a grade sometime within their school experience. The first bar labeled <u>All</u> represents the total percentage of all students repeating a grade (19%). The second bar represents students whose parents had HIGH participation (11%). Bar three represents students whose parents had a MODERATE rating (16%). And the last bar has the percentages of those in the LOW category (25%). **It can thus be seen that students with low parental involvement are 2 ½ times more likely to have to repeat a grade than those with high involvement.** ***And like the Energizer Bunny in the TV commercials, the pattern just goes on and on and on!***

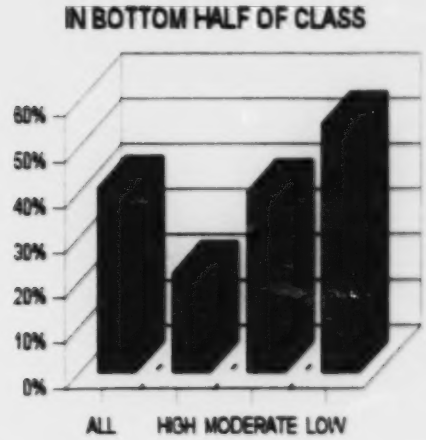


Figure 2

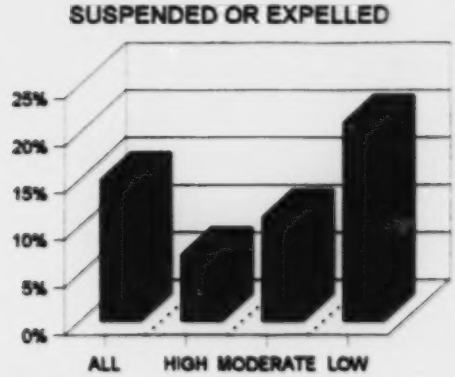


Figure 3

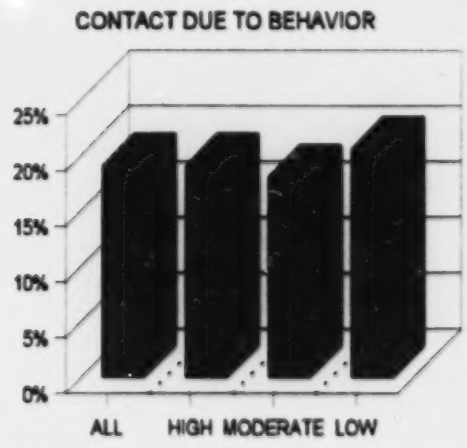


Figure 4

The same type of pattern repeats itself, figure 2 shows the relation of parental involvement in the area of suspended or expelled students. **Those with low parental involvement are 3 times as likely (21% to 7%) to be suspended or expelled than those whose parents are highly participatory.**

High to moderate levels of participation significantly reduce negative behavioral results. High parental participation **more than cuts in half,** the likelihood of a child being in the lower half of their class and **makes it 1/3 less likely** a parent would be contacted because of bad behavior.

Because of statistics like these private schools have now been thrust into the public spotlight. These schools have shown they are not only successful in getting parents involved, but also in reducing drop-out rates. The success in dealing with problems that seem to plague the public systems, have many people feeling public schools should try to use some of their characteristics as models. Let's take a closer look at private schools.

Because of the continued problems in the public sector, private school enrollment has drastically gone up; the highest number of students, and overall success remain in the Catholic schools.

The National Assessment of Educational progress reported Catholic school students did better than their public school counterparts by an average of 4.5% in math, 4.8% in science and 12.5% in reading. In comparisons of other standardized tests, Catholic school students are a grade ahead, and drop-out rates are 15% or higher in public schools . Archdiocesan schools report a 2% drop-out rate. They have a two grade advantage of their public school counterpart, while having almost 2 ½ times less money with which to work (McManus).

Another area of considerable difference is the cost per student. In most cases, Catholic schools (and most private) average expenditure per student, is only about half that of the public sector. In New York, parochial schools spend an average of $1,735 per student while the public school average is about $7,100. **Even though the New York system spent more than four times more per student, their on time graduation rate was a terrible 38%. Meanwhile, the Catholic system graduated, on time, an incredible 99%. A 61% difference.**

Another characteristic that separates Catholic (and most private schools) from the public schools is the low number of administrative positions. In New York, there were 946,000 students attending public schools, compared to 110,000 in the Catholic system. Yet the public schools employed 3,930 in its bureaucracy, compared to just 33 for the Catholic system (McManus). If the number of students were equal, and the ratio stayed

the same, there would still only be 287 in the Catholic system. Another example: the Washington D.C. system, where the public schools have 81,000 students and 1,500 adminstrators, while the Catholic system has 50,000 students and a central administration of only 17 people (U.S. News & World).

It would seem with all these stats, the public system would try to use the models before them to help improve their own schools. *But for some reason they continue to mire themselves in the quicksand of excuses and hang on for dear life to the status quo.* They contend the Catholic schools have a far lower minority base and they are basically able to screen their prospects, while the public schools must take everyone who comes. While this policy may be true to some extent, Sister Catherine McNamee, president of the National Catholic Education Association, insists that the parochial high schools take about 90% of those that apply, and very few are expelled once they are accepted. The critics still claim it is that 10% that make all the difference. The late Albert Shanker claimed **"They don't accept 10%, and they throw out the other 1% but that's the whole ball game. Any teacher will tell you that the problem is one or two kids, not everybody** (Rachlin).

This is an aspect of the public debate that does not have any clear winners. Granted, the Catholic system may refuse 10% of those who apply, but how many of those are needing financial help that the schools may not be able to give? How many of those are refused simply because the limited facilities can not hold any more students?

If the truth be known, a large number of problem children are subcontracted out to private institutions. Not all the students that attended public school are still in their system, and the worse ones are funneled into a different place. So that statement cannot be used to totally justify many schools' bad performance.

When all-is-said-and-done, the minority populations in many Catholic and lower priced private institutions resemble relatively close to the minority populations of the area. In 1991, the minority enrollment of black and Hispanic children, for the Catholic schools, was about 19% (Chira). Since then, it had risen to 23.1% in 1995 (Seattle Times). There are many inner-city Catholic schools that have very high minority enrollment and because of their programs, they significantly increase the chances of the minorities to graduate. **In fact, in many poor urban areas, Catholic schools can raise the Black and Hispanic chances of graduating three or four times.** Poverty does have an effect on the educational process, but some of that can be alleviated by simply getting or coaxing parents to be involved. The Catholic schools do not concentrate on diversity, they focus on academics.

What does this all mean? It would definitely appear Catholic schools are doing a much better job in the total education process than public schools. While 83% of Catholic students go on to college, only about 50% go from the public schools (U.S. News & World). There is an increasingly higher number of students who are graduating from public schools, who have trouble reading or even doing very basic math. It is a sad state, of the partial ruin, that has brought our schools to the place where they are today.

What can be done?

It must be the pulsation and the heartbeat of educators today. *The political and the fat must go, and teachers and administrators, both public and private, must learn to put the needs of the child first.* It is not a question anymore of who is qualified and who can do this and who can do that, but it is time to realize that the worth of the child is far greater than any dollar amount that can be put next to their names. It needs to be more than what is on some political agenda and campaign ticket, it needs to become the cause of educators all across this country. *"We must make the education of every student possible in the United States worth something once again!"*

There are many possible ways of working on this problem. One may be the allowing of parental choice, coupled with a voucher system. An allowance or scholarship, of around $2,500, towards any school that the parents may choose, is an idea being considered by many states. This would give the parents a choice of not only where they would go, but it would invariably force many more parents to get invovled in the process of their child's education. With this, parents would take their children out of poor performing schools and would be looking towards the best schools they could get for their children. They would almost be forced to monitor the child, and his or her academic progress, to determine if they are getting their money's worth. It would force the bad schools to improve, or face the continued loss of students and the accompanying money. This will cause the overall quality level of education everywhere to jump (Bonsteel & Bonilla, 1997).

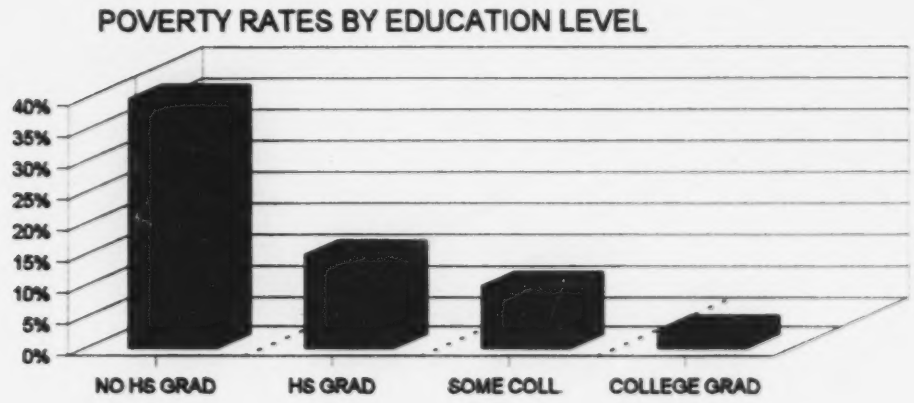
Right now, because public schools have a monopoly on school funds, there is little or no pressure the parents of America can exert on the school systems. But in a true free market system, which is controlled by choice, parents would not have to continue to funnel money into a mediocre or poor product. This would have a dramatic effect of the whole of education in America.

While this may sound good to a majority of Americans, there is still a very vocal minority who opposes it and while they may be small in numbers, they certainly are not toothless when it comes to powerful lobbies and campaigns. In the California Parental Choice/ Scholarship initiative, Helen Bernstein, former president of the United Teachers of Los Angeles, stated the plan to give parents choice, and $2,600 vouchers would "**rob California's schools of $1.5 billion.**" She circulated fliers, headlines blaring, "**The Parental Choice/ Scholarship initiative isn't designed to improve our public school system. It's designated to destroy it ...**" (McManus).

A highly slanted view and one that does not explain fully the extent of the funding process. She failed to state that even though $2,600 leaves the school system, the other half of per students funding, $2,600, remains in the public schools. This means without a student to educate, there are more resources per student for those that remain (McManus). Which should, when combined with the previously stated reasons, provide help to the public schools to provide a better education.

Not only would it help all students, but studies show that it would change the inner-city picture of education dramatically. It would provide poor and minority students the chance to escape the cycle of poverty by allowing them a true choice. In many

schools, it would no longer be acceptable to have a 30 to 40% drop-out rate and they would have to shape up or face a dwindling student base. It would give poor mothers and parents a chance, a new start for their children. They would no longer be shackled by the lack of choices poverty brings. For, as the educational rate increases, the poverty rate decreases. **In those families where the householder has not graduated from high school, poverty rate is 40%. In the families where the householder has graduated from high school, but has no college, the poverty rate drops to 17%, a 2 1/3 times drop. Those families where the householder has some college have a poverty rate of 11%. And those that graduate from college have only a 3% rate, more than 13 times lower, than those with no high school graduation** (Zill).



It must be an obvious benefit to be able to lower the drop-out rates and increase the educational levels, thereby increasing the chances, significantly, of a person to escape poverty. The boom for minorities and poverty-ridden families would be like finding a small gold mine in your backyard. It may not make you rich, but it sure can make your live a whole lot easier.

The last great roadblock, to this educational revolution, is the issue of Separation of Church and State. Many people are saying this type of funding, being provided by the government, could not be used to help pay tuition to religious-affiliated schools. They feel it would be a violation of the 1st Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Unfortunately, they are very vocal about this misguided belief, that the Founding Fathers did not want the government, in any way, to promote religion.

As a matter of fact, a majority of these men were very religious and have stated, the very destiny of our country is in the hands of the Creator. Let's look at the words of these great men and let them speak, for their intents, concerning the Constitution and the course of our country.

> ***"I consider it an indispensable duty to close this last solemn act of my official life by commending the interests of our dearest country to the protection of Almighty God and those who have the Superintendence of them into His Holy Keeping."*** **- George Washington,**
> **Prayer at Valley Forge**

> ***"It is the duty of nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits and humbly to implore His protection and favor."*** **-George Washington**

> ***"I have lived, sir a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth - that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?*** **-Benjamin Franklin**

> ***"We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God...Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us."*** **-Abraham Lincoln, 1896 Proclamation.**

And the list could go on and on. Not the words of men who wanted religion kept out of government, but rather the words of great men, whose impact on our country can scarcely be measured, that felt the destiny of all that transpired was in His hands. Men that believed it was the duty of a nation to preserve the freedom of its people, to worship the Almighty God. Men that truly believed that we are "... one nation under God..." and who, within the schools of their time, had the Bible as one of their main textbooks.

It was the belief of men like George Washington, that our government should not establish or control the Church but that the government should be guided by the creed "..that they (all men) are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights..." Endowed with rights for which these men were willing to risk their lives, to protect at all cost. This is the reasoning and intent of the first part of the 1st Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." (World Book). The framers refused to allow the government to force an established or official religion on the people. Simply stated, the freedom of religion was protected by the government, but the government would not establish a Church, nor force the people to follow it, as the monarchy of England had done. Most of the original colonists had fled from England to escape religious persecution. That is why this concept is the first right to be listed. It was that important to them.

It is the misunderstanding, of the entirety of history, that has led to this false belief, that it would be unconstitutional to have government funds used in religious affiliated schools. The only way this process could be considered unconstitutional, is, if the government of the U.S., formed a law establishing a National Church and the school was

part of that affiliation. Anything being proposed today, would probably be applauded by the founding fathers. Yet the debate still rages and it seems it will be a while before it will end.

Ideas about how education can be helped abound. There are many options available, if we really want to make a difference. We must find ways to work together, both public and private sectors, to establish a better education process, one that will serve all children, no matter their race or ethnic origin.

Public schools can learn an incredible amount from the private sector. **No system is perfect beyond improvement yet, no system is so bad, that there is no hope.**

All must be willing to change, for it is a changing society that our children are coming into. Everyone must be willing to adapt, in part, to the changes that are taking place. And yet some may need to return to the roots of the past, so we may be grounded in the things that have helped our country be so great. The cost may be high and the sacrifice may be great, but when it all boils down, the question still remains:

"What about the children?"

Raise your hand if you know, for the future of our country

depends on how we answer!

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Trickle-Down Involvement

An Overview of Federal, State and Local Parental Involvement Efforts

Marc Elin

Despite nearly 25 years of federal legislation and support for parent involvement, most states have not developed adequate parent involvement policies, passed enabling legislation or produced written guidelines. Without increases in federal funding, it appears much of the existing legislation amounts to little more than lip service paid to the widely accepted idea that parents play a critical role in a child's education.

Involvement On The Federal Level
Chapter 1 Programs

Federal funding for Chapter 1 programs serve traditional education where students have been identified as scoring lower than 50 percent in any one area on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT). Requirements schools must meet to receive federal funds for eligible students include:

* To inform parents of participating children about the specific instructional objectives and methods of the program.
* To support the efforts of parents, including training parents to work with their children at home to attain the instructional objectives of the program.
* To train parents, teachers, principals, and other staff members involved in the program to work effectively with parents.
* To provide a comprehensive range of opportunities for parents to become informed including full participation of parents who lack literacy skills or whose native language is not English.
* To provide parents with reports on child's progress
* To make parents aware of parental involvement requirements

If all monies (federal or state) allocated to schools came with guidelines similar to those of Chapter 1, perhaps the need to discuss improvement of the school parental

involvement programs would not be necessary. However, in a 1995 national survey (Elam) the public favored more state and local control over federally allocated money – even if it means receiving less federal funds.

Head Start Programs

The Federal Head Start program was launched 25 years ago in efforts to help poor pre-school children ages 3 to 5 beat the crippling effects of poverty by getting them started in school earlier. But today, demand has far-exceeded supply.

Thirty-six percent of the nation's two million poor children eligible are enrolled in a Head Start program. The less fortunate children can end up on waiting lists up to two years before they are enrolled. In California, the share of eligible children in Head Start programs is only 28 percent. San Francisco alone has an estimated 6,000 low-income preschoolers on waiting lists for subsidized care at any given time (Nakao).

Low-income families (annual wages less than $15,000) who can not afford to spend as high as 23 percent of their total income on private care, add their names to the long waiting lists for subsidized care. Conversely, middle to high income families (annual wages of $50,000 or more) pay only about 6 percent for private child care..

Despite its good intentions, there are many who criticize the structure of the program, challenging the effectiveness of the one-year, half-day program. They also argue that Head Start offers little to no follow-up once children leave the program, putting them at a disadvantage over others who can afford to stay in an educationally conducive environment until they reach kindergarten.

Children in Head Start Programs by Race:
38% Black
33% white
22% Hispanic
4% American Indian
3% Asian

Department of Health and Human Services

Another problem with Head Start Programs is the lack of consistent standards. Preschool personnel in as many as 27 states require neither experience nor any form of education.

Federal Grants

The Fund for the Improvement and Reform of School and Teaching (FIRST) was created in 1988 as a program under the Federal Office of Educational Research and Improvement, to improve the education and achievement of America's elementary and secondary students. Congress made it part of the mission of FIRST to encourage and support innovative and effective partnership between families and schools.

FIRST awards federal grants to eligible local education agencies for projects that help families work with their children at home, that train teachers in methods of effective communication and cooperation with parents, that enhance existing family involvement programs, and that initiate programs to promote family responsibility for children's education.

Competition for FIRST grants is steep with awards ranging from $ 40,000 to $ 180,000 over a one, two, or three year period. In 1989, fourteen of 414 applicants were awarded grants; in 1990, thirty-one of 436 applicants received funding. Examples of 1989-1990 grant award winners include:

Muskegon's Early Intervention to Improve School Achievement, Muskegon, MI. This program assesses student achievement and shares the results with the family as an indicator of how parents' attitudes influences behavior.

Involvement of Families in Improving the Educational Achievements of Their Children, St. Paul, MN. Parents receive literacy and help with parenting and family issues.

Los Angeles Family/School Partnership Project, Los Angeles, CA. Parents are trained to represent their community as members of school councils.

Family/School Partners in Education: A Model for Rural Schools, Emporia, VA. This program trains parents as tutors. The business community is actively involved, providing "work-release time" for parent training.

INVOLVEMENT ON THE STATE LEVEL

California 1989-1994

Between 1988 and 1990, the State of California began a process that was to alter the relationship between parents and schools in California, the initiative designed to enhance parental involvement fell into four broad categories:

3. **Governance** – parents provide advice on programs and school policies
4. **Client Services** – parents receive some form of service
5. **Parents as Teachers** – allow parents to serve as instructional aides or classroom volunteers.
6. **Parents as Parents** – help parents encourage and assist their children at home.

A review of parent involvement activities in California revealed that the state department of education was not providing leadership to help schools involve parents in the two types of activities that most directly support the state's major goal of improving the curriculum:

* Involving parents in learning activities with their children at home,
* Establishing partnerships with community and family service agencies to benefit students and their families.

Using the five types of parent involvement developed by Joyce Espstein, the California State Board of Education introduced a policy statement called the *Parent Involvement Initiative*, January 13, 1989. A sixth point was added by the state to show the importance of linking the school and family with the community to strengthen schools and to improve students' learning.

The policy states: Comprehensive programs of parent involvement require schools to improve parents at all grade levels and in a variety of roles. These programs should be designed to:

- Help parents develop parenting skills and foster conditions at home that support learning.
- Provide parents with the knowledge of techniques designed to assist children in learning at home.
- Promote clear two-way communication between the school and the family as to the school programs and children's progress.
- Involve parents, after appropriate training, in instructional and support roles at school.
- Support parents as decision makers and develop their leadership in governance, advisory and advocacy roles.
- Provide access to coordinate community and support services for children and families.

Although a state law now requires districts and schools to work to involve parents, the districts and schools have a great deal of leeway to adapt parent involvement to the needs of their students, families and communities.

In 1994, California passed a law requiring public schools to establish programs that instruct and train parents in school-related activities at home and in positive discipline. The law went on to say that schools must also put in place programs that enhance communication between parents and schools. However, without a built-in evaluation and assessment requirement, the law remains more theoretical than constructive.

INVOLVEMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Stockton Unified School District (SUSD) 1989-1990

Ranked twelfth for its student size, Stockton Unified School District can represent the problems facing both smaller and larger districts in California. As with most school districts, Stockton developed parent involvement programs in keeping with the 1989 state initiative.

District Advisory Council (DAC)

Twenty-five parents from Stockton Unified School District (SUSD) served as active members of the District Advisory council for the 1989-1990 school year; activities ranged from making staff/policy recommendations, to facilitating a District-wide Mini Conference for parents.

Categorical Programs

Categorical programs employ a School Community Relations Advisor to facilitate the involvement of parents. During the 1989-1990 school year, in addition to DAC

activities there was one major district-wide activity: the Parents conference (with a district-wide student body of over 30,000), at an estimated total cost of $1,000. Topics presented included:

1. **Parent Support for Student Learning in the Home**
   - Let's Get Real (Mathematics)
   - How Parents Can Assist Their Children in the Literature based program
   - Parents Are Teachers, Too.

2. **Systems for Communication between Parents and the District**
   - District Complaint Procedures
   - Parent-Teacher Conferences

3. **Description of State Programs**
   - State Board of Education Parent Involvement Initiatives
   - School-based Coordinated Program

4. **Encouragement for Parental Involvement**
   - Parent Empowerment
   - What Parent Involvement Means to Me
   - Parent Involvement in PTA

5. **Parental Involvement in Governance**
   - Understanding the School Budget
   - Role and Responsibilities of the SAC/SSC: The Differences Between the Two

6. **Information About District Programs**
   - Early Childhood Education
   - Year-Round Schools
   - International Baccalaureate Program
   - Bilingual Education

SUSD Parent Involvement Summary for 1989-1990

The following points were taken from a summary produced by SUSD for the 1989-1990 school year:

1. Parent involvement fell short of meeting Federal goals.

2. There was limited parent involvement at the district level, given the district has over 30,000 students, and the District-wide Mini Conference was attended by only 75 parents.

3. Of the activities that related directly to parents, most focused on school-to-home communication. Very few of the activities focused on what parents can do at home to provide a supportive home environment and assistance with learning. School plans should be revised to de-emphasize one-way communication from school personnel to parents.

The review of federal state and local effort to create parental involvement are not encouraging. What becomes painfully clear is that legislation without binding requirements leaves schools, students and parents to continue to drift further apart.

★★★★★★

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Bridging the Gap

Sandy Campos
Hedda Dillon
Kimberlie Ballard
Patricia Kelly

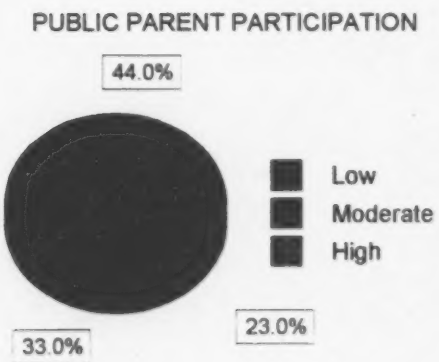
The lack of parent participation is a reality of today's educational system. This is tragic because parents are essential to their child's education and their future.

According to Nicholas Zill the results of students who have low or no parental involvement are:

- More likely to have to repeat a grade
- Three times more likely to get suspended or expelled
- Usually placed in the lower half of their class
- Less likely that a parent would be contacted because of a child's bad behavior

Why does the parent stay away?

Years ago educators sent out the message to parents. "We are the educators who know how to educate your child." Some parents stay away, because they are not sure why their involvement at school is important. Many do not know they are needed, because the only time they hear from their child's teacher is when the child has done something wrong.



Public Parent Participation

As educators, our focus should be to urgently unite parents and schools. In today's society, this cannot be over-stressed. Parent involvement constitutes successful school children. Your child may be the primary beneficiary.

When parents involve themselves in their child's education, the benefits are likely to be positive and abundant. Sattes "linked parent involvement with increased student self-esteem, fewer behavior problems, and better school attendance" (Swap). These bi-products of active participation are crucial ingredients in making every child successful.

Build a Winning Partnership

More significant are the benefits the child may reap in the academic realm. Swap cited a study conducted by Travoto and Bucher who reported involving parents as reinforcers of their child's 15 week reading program. Their research found inproved performance on the Stanford Reading Achievement Test by those children whose parents were actively involved in the education process.

Another study conducted in England compared the effects of two special programs on reading; the authors found that elementary school children "who read to their parents 2 to 4 times a week using books sent home from school showed highly significant gains in reading achievement compared to students with no intervention" (Swap).

The importance of parent involvement has been amply substantiated. This participation provides the additional support that is so desperately and urgently needed. Our primary focus should be to successfully unite parents and schools.

"Make Parents Your Homework"

In "Make Parents Your Homework" Tracy Dodge recommends sending out a survey that enables the teacher to provide parents with the things they need most: information. Attach an announcement flier with detailed information on a workshop that the teacher will present, i.e. the workshop will focus on organizational skills, time-management skills and active study strategies (Instructor).

Organizational skills "are crucial to managing the business of school" (Instructor). As the presenter, be sure to point out the children should study in the same area every night. Possibly suggest a Homework/Travel folder. These are inexpensive and easily made. Purchase a two-pocket folder and label one side "Done" and the other side "To Do". This enables the children to be organized in a visual manner.

"Parents are uncertain about how to involve themselves in their child's education."

Time-management skills are crucial in determining the success of any child. Be sure to highlight the importance of a definite study hour, diminishing distractions, and take breaks. Each child learns better at certain times throughout the day, but remind parents the importance of establishing a routine bedtime.

Study skills are equally important for educational success. Dodge recommended improving studying by having the child recite aloud, draw a sketch, write questions that may be important, and visualize by closing their eyes and picturing it. At the end of the workshop it is crucial to encourage questions and to share comments.

Home Visits

Home visits are another great approach for getting to know your students and their families. These visits should be seen as a positive experience. Parents tend to associate the word, "home-visits," with a negative connotation. This is your opportunity to express your expectations and concerns for the child and work with the parents as a team.

"It is a well known fact that when parents become more involved in their child's education, their child becomes more successful in the classroom."

During the visits it is important to show respect for all of the diverse cultures you may encounter. You may want to ask the families about their cultures if you are unfamiliar with them. You may also want to invite them to help you learn more about them, so that either you or they could teach the other students in your class. This would be a great way to gain acceptance of diversity in your classroom. It would also show your "team" you are genuinely interested in learning about who they truly are.

This will also help you to understand your students. For example, if some of them come from poor families and you know may not eat breakfast (an important factor affecting the child's learning ability in the classroom) try looking into the free breakfast program or other resources which may be available.

Congratulations; you have taken the time to get to know about your students and their families. The initial barrier has been broken! This will help your parents feel less intimidated. They may be more willing to call with questions, concerns, or volunteer their time. The most important thing is to establish open-communication between home and school.

A very successful activity that enhances and encourages parent involvement is a cultural potluck. Encourage parents to bring an authentic dish; stress it does not have to be a fancy or expensive dish. This is a dynamic activity that not only promotes parent involvement, but also cultural awareness.

Working Parents

In some cases parents cannot come to the school to participate in scheduled activity but they can still be an asset to the children and their classroom. Some parents would be excited and thrilled if given the responsibility to correct papers which ultimately provide parents with a sense of achievement and contribution.

In conclusion, we have presented a wide range of activities which promote parental involvement. Though these activities require substantial time and dedication, the reward is well worth it for there is no reward greater than uniting the parent and the school.

★★★★★★

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Appendix A:

Parent Involvement Sheet

Name: _____

Relationship to student: _____

I would like to help in the following way(s):

- ☐ **Chaperone**
- ☐ **Share about my job**
- ☐ **Provide refreshments**
- ☐ **Correct Papers**
- ☐ **Listen to students read**
- ☐ **Keep records**
- ☐ **Arts and crafts**
- ☐ **Teach a special skill**
- ☐ **Other suggestions:**

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B:

Please complete this survey and return it to school by _____

Yes	No	Some		
☐	☐	☐	•	**Does your child have a consistent homework time?**
☐	☐	☐	•	**Does your child get discouraged with the assigned homework?**
☐	☐	☐	•	**Does your child have a designated study area?**
☐	☐	☐	•	**Does your child complete the assigned homework?**

I wish my child's teacher knew: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Effective Environments

Marc Elin

Effective Home Environments

Student achievement, school organization, and school resources can all be influenced by one other important factor: the family background of the students. In a 1995 study of test scores and demographics by the Educational Testing Service, five factors were identified that largely determined student achievement on standardized tests:

- reading more than ten pages a day
- excessive television watching
- student absenteeism
- having a least three types of reading material in the home
- having two parents in the home

What is important to note is that the first three items are within the control of parents. Low scores from low income children (whose parents are generally not well-educated) reflect the need for schools to develop educational support programs for parents as well as their children.

Effective School Environments

According to a 1992 review of 29 parental involvement programs by the University of Illinois it was determined programs that included components of parent training produced about a half-grade level increase in reading, math and other subjects.

What distinguished these programs from others was their approach to communication. Effective parent involvement programs must be developed with an awareness of the range of parent interests, energies, ideas, needs, cultures, languages, and lifestyles. Categories of communication for parental involvement include:

- Face-to-Face
  - school groups/councils
  - teacher/parent conferences
  - parent centers (materials, advice and support)
  - workshops
- Technological
  - videotapes (educational/parent training or recorded school events, workshops and meeting that parents may have been unable to attend)
  - Telephone hotlines (for school events or classroom updates)
- Written Communication
  - Monthly newsletters (produced by individual teacher, grade level, or school)
  - Educational take-home packets (for parent education or parent/student learning activities)

Effective parent involvement programs were also judged to be flexible to the families they serve. To meet the needs of parents with limited time or access to involvement activities, a responsive school may use a technological form of communication delivery system (e.g. videotapes, telephone hotlines, etc.) Another alternative solution could be a face-to-face approach such as a school sponsored homework center.

The idea behind school-sponsored homework centers is to provide technical assistance (through teachers, reference materials, and computers), that students may not have access to at home. To help fund the cost of the homework centers, many schools look to the local business community for sponsorship. One example of a successful community relationship is the Reading School District in Reading Pennsylvania. It operates 16 homework centers in elementary and community buildings to service the district's 12, 000 students (elementary through high school). In 1990 the centers were used by more than 400 students. Corporate sponsors fund the centers, each of which costs about $15,000 a year to operate. The school district provides busing to and from the centers at a cost of about $19,000 a year.

First year results from the Reading School District program found that 87 percent of the pupils who went to the centers improved their grade, 67 percent improved study habits and 66 percent developed a better attitude towards school. We have learned many lessons since the time of the Coleman Report (1961) which informed us that parental education levels accounted for 85 percent of student achievement in 1961. Today, we know that regardless of ethnic or economic background, any child who is backed by strong parental involvement has a better chance of succeeding both socially and academically.

Marc Elin

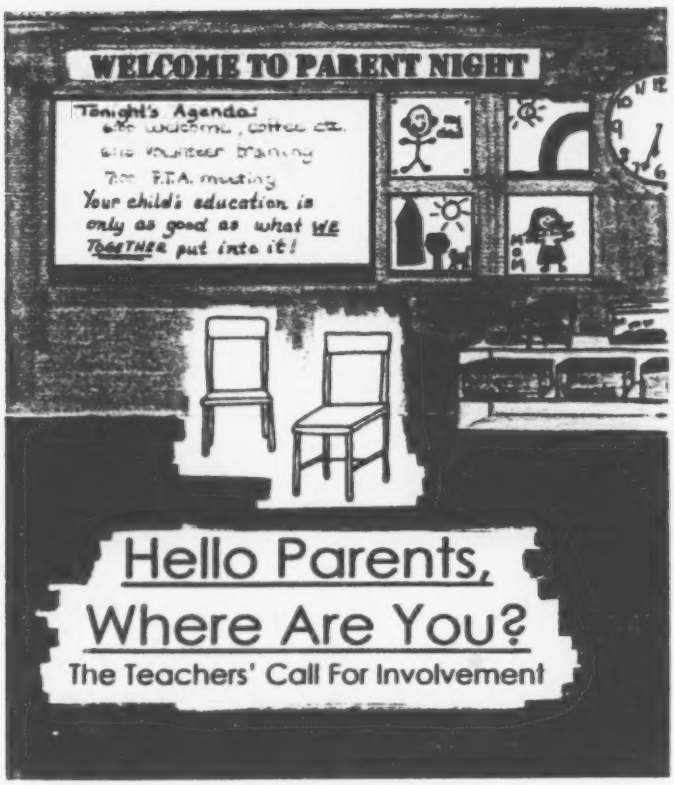
*****

So

Dear Parents,

We, the teachers, ask you:

"Where do you stand?"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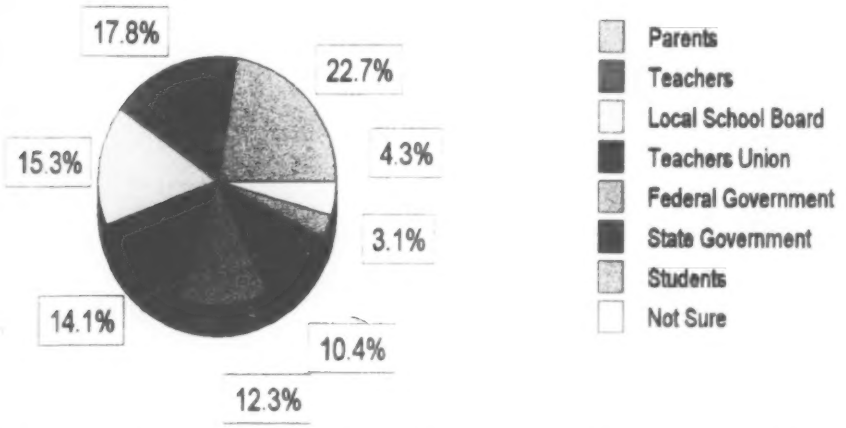
Parental Involvement in Education

To you, dear parents of school age children in America, I pose these questions:

Q1. Who bears the responsibility for K-12 education's problems?



Results of an exclusive poll of 211 Chief Executive Officers and Chief Financial Officers from the Nation's Fastest Growing publicly held companies. *Investor's Business Daily,* October 27, 1997.

Q2: When was the last time you attended a play, science fair, or sports event at your child's school?

Q3: When was the last time you volunteered to serve on a committee at your child's school?

Q4: When was the last time you volunteered to do anything at all - at your child's school?

Q5: When was the last time you attended a PTA meeting, back to school night or general meeting at your child's school?

Now, be honest, give yourself a grade and then- next time-before criticizing the teachers, teachers' aides, or your child's school do something to improve your own report card.

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